

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An information distribution apparatus for mediating distribution of information from a sending apparatus to a receiving apparatus, comprising:

5 a sending/receiving control part for conducting communication with the sending apparatus or the receiving apparatus;

a distribution rank storage part for storing a distribution rank selected by each receiver with respect to distribution information from each sender, among distribution ranks defining distribution conditions containing
10 designation of a summarization degree of distribution information in a plurality of levels;

a distribution information storage part for storing an original of distribution information from the sending apparatus; and

a summarization processing part for, when receiving a request for
15 distribution of information from the sending apparatus through the sending/receiving control part, obtaining a distribution rank selected by the receiver of the distribution information with respect to the distribution information from the sender, from the distribution rank storage part, and conducting summarization processing of distribution information stored in the
20 distribution information storage part in accordance with designation of a summarization degree corresponding to the obtained distribution rank,

wherein the distribution information in accordance with the distribution rank is distributed from the sending/receiving control part to each receiving apparatus.

25 2. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the distribution conditions further include designation of a distribution time.

3. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 1, comprising a
30 retransmission processing part for receiving a request for transmission of an original of distribution information from a receiver of distribution information subjected to the summarization processing, extracting an original stored in

the distribution information storage part, and distributing the original to the receiving apparatus through the sending/receiving control part.

4. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 1, comprising a
5 rank information passing part for totalizing distribution ranks stored in the distribution rank storage part, and sending the totalized result to the sending apparatus through the sending/receiving control part.

5. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 1, comprising an
10 image information generating part for adding screen definition information of a rank setting screen for allowing a receiver to input the distribution rank by selection, or access information to the rank setting screen to each distribution information; and

a distribution rank updating part for updating contents stored in the
15 distribution rank storage part, based on a selection result which a receiver inputs by selection on the rank setting screen.

6. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the
rank setting screen includes a questionnaire column in addition to a selection
20 column of the distribution rank, the information distribution apparatus comprising:

a questionnaire result storage part for storing answer data to the
questionnaire column;

a questionnaire record updating part for receiving answer data to the
25 questionnaire column from the receiving apparatus through the sending/receiving control part, and updating contents stored in the questionnaire result storage part; and

a questionnaire information passing part for totalizing questionnaire
results stored in the questionnaire result storage part, and sending the
30 totalized result to the sending apparatus through the sending/receiving control part.

7. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 6, comprising a menu storage part for storing predetermined questionnaire contents and questionnaire contents provided by each sender, wherein questionnaire contents to be displayed in the questionnaire column on the rank setting screen are selected by each sender from questionnaire contents stored in the menu storage part.

8. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the distribution rank storage part includes a region for storing a distribution rank selected by each receiver on a sender basis or on the basis of the kind of information distributed from each sender.

9. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 1, wherein summarization processing of distribution information by the summarization processing part is either one of the following processing selected by each sender: processing of conducting summarization based on a predetermined rule and processing of outputting an abstract previously provided together with the distribution information in accordance with each distribution rank from the sender as a summarized result.

10. An information distribution apparatus according to claim 1, comprising a standard rank determining part for determining an initial distribution rank based on evaluation by a plurality of receivers.

11. An information distribution method for mediating distribution of information from a sending apparatus to a receiving apparatus, comprising:
storing a distribution rank selected by each receiver with respect to distribution information from each sender, among distribution ranks defining distribution conditions containing designation of a summarization degree of distribution information in a plurality of levels, in a distribution rank storage part;

when receiving a request for distribution of information from the

5 sending apparatus, obtaining a distribution rank, which is selected by a receiver of the distribution information with respect to the distribution information from the sender, from the distribution rank storage part; and summarizing the distribution information in accordance with designation of a summarization degree corresponding to the obtained distribution rank to send it to the receiving apparatus.

10 12. An information distribution method according to claim 11, comprising: when receiving a request for distribution of information from the sending apparatus, storing an original of the distribution information in a distribution information storage part;

15 when receiving a request for sending an original of distribution information from a receiver of distribution information subjected to the summarization processing, extracting an original stored in the distribution information storage part to distribute it to the receiving apparatus.

20 13. An information distribution method according to claim 11, wherein distribution ranks stored in the distribution rank storage part are summarized as selection results of a plurality of receivers and sent to a sending apparatus.

25 14. An information distribution method according to claim 11, wherein screen definition information of a rank setting screen displayed by a receiving apparatus for allowing a receiver to input the distribution rank by selection or access information to the rank setting screen are added to each distribution information, and

30 a selection result of a distribution rank input by the receiver on the rank setting screen is received, and contents stored in the distribution rank storage part are updated based on the received selection result.

15. An information distribution method according to claim 14, wherein the rank setting screen includes a questionnaire column as well as a selection

column of the distribution rank,

answer data to the questionnaire column is received together with the selection result of the distribution rank from the receiving apparatus, and the received answer data is stored in a questionnaire result storage part, and

5 results of a questionnaire stored in the questionnaire result storage part are summarized and sent to the sending apparatus.

16. An information distribution method according to claim 15, wherein predetermined questionnaire contents and questionnaire contents provided by
10 each sender are stored in a menu storage part, and questionnaire contents selected by each sender from the menu storage part is displayed in the questionnaire column on the rank setting screen.

17. An information distribution method according to claim 11, wherein the
15 distribution rank is selected by each receiver on a sender basis or on the basis of a kind of information distributed from each sender.

18. An information distribution method according to claim 11, wherein summarization processing of the distribution information is either one of the
20 following processing selected by each sender: processing of conducting summarization based on a predetermined rule and processing of outputting an abstract previously provided together with the distribution information in accordance with each distribution rank from the sender as a summarized result.

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19. An information distribution method according to claim 11, wherein an initial distribution rank is determined based on evaluation by a plurality of receivers.

30 20. A program for allowing a computer to execute processing of mediating distribution of information from a sending apparatus to a receiving apparatus, comprising:

when receiving a request for distribution of information from the sending apparatus, storing an original of distribution information from the sending apparatus in a distribution information storage part;

obtaining, from a distribution rank storage part, a distribution rank
5 defining distribution conditions containing designation of a summarization degree of distribution information in a plurality of levels, selected by a receiver of the distribution information with respect to the distribution information from the sender; and

summarizing the distribution information stored in the distribution
10 information storage part in accordance with designation of a summarization degree corresponding to the obtained distribution rank, and allowing a computer to execute processing of distributing the summarized distribution information to the receiving apparatus.